Advice to awaken for the struggle against the self

- It is human nature to thank one who has been gracious. Reflect and estimate the seen and unseen favours bestowed on us by the Almighty. All of the creations of God could not even provide a fraction of such bounty.
- Look at the air we breathe day and night, and upon which our existence as well as that of other living beings is dependent. Nothing can remain alive if it is deprived of such air for even a few minutes. What a marvelous gift of God it is! If all men of the world laboured together to create such a gift, they could not do so. In the same way, reflect on other gifts of God such as the external bodily senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, and inner faculties such as thinking, imagination, and reason, each one of which carries unlimited benefits and which is granted to us by Our Lord. He is the Creator and King of this vast universe. Human being, a creature crawling on one of the smallest planets miserably fails to grasp the extent of his own small world, whose sun cannot even be compared with far greater suns of innumerable galaxies. Our solar system is nothing compared to several other solar systems, which still elude the powerful telescopes of great explorers and investigators. Look at the human brain—what a fascinating creation it is! Can the combined efforts of all human beings make even a single living neuron (brain cell) that Almighty God has created and creates all the time! Surely this God-given brain deserves to be solely the seat of divinely inspired good ideas and not evil thoughts!
- Every living being in this Universe is within the range of His divine vision, so remember God and all His favours, and don't disobey Him. He fulfils all our needs without having any need of our adoration. Whether you observe His commands or transgress them makes no difference to Him. It is for the sake of our own benefit that He has enjoined good and forbidden indecency. Overpower satanic ideas and convert the spheres of your mind into divine realm by driving out the evil forces and inviting the divine hosts, so that God may help and protect you in the dangers threatening to befall you in this battle. Do not have any expectations from anyone but God. With all humility and all the tears your eyes can offer, pray to God and seek His assistance to emerge victorious in this crucial battle against the self.

Conclusion:

- Imam Ali (a) said: "One who struggles against himself so as to obey God, in the eyes of God, his station is that of a pious martyr." [Al-Amidi, *Ghurar ul Hikam wa Durar ul Kalim*, hadith # 3546]

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... By the soul and (by) Him who made it perfect, and then inspired it to understand what is wrong and what is right for it. Truly is successful the one who purifies (his soul).
(Qur'an, 91: 7-9)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) said: "The Prophet (s) of God dispatched a contingent of the army (to the battlefront). Upon their (successful) return, he (s) said: 'Blessed are those who have performed the minor *jihad* and have yet to perform the major *jihad*.' When asked, 'What is the major *jihad?'* the Prophet (s) replied: 'The *jihad* of the self (struggle against self)'".
[Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 19, p. 182, hadith no. 31]

Merits of the Soul ...

Struggle against the Self

(jihad al-nafs)

A human's soul is the scene of a struggle of two competing powers. Divine power attracts him towards heavenly spheres, and inspires him to acts of goodness. Satanic power tempts him towards realms of darkness and shame, and invites him to acts of evil. When the divine forces are victorious, a person emerges as a virtuous and blessed being, in the company of prophets, saints, and the pious. When, however, the satanic forces dominate, the person becomes rebellious and vicious and is grouped with infidels, oppressors, wrongdoers and those who are cursed.

What is the struggle against the self?

Jihad al-nafs is the struggle against evil ideas, desires and powers of lust, anger, and insatiable imagination, placing all of them under the dictates of reason and faith in obedience to God's commands, and finally, purging all satanic ideas and influences from one's soul. This struggle is considered as the major struggle (*al-jihad al-akbar)* as it is much more difficult than fighting in the battlefield, for in the struggle against the self, one has to constantly battle enemies that are hosted inside his own existence. Islamic ethical teachings indicate that the one who succeeds in this struggle can rise above and beyond the level of angels, and one who fails in this struggle will descend to a level lower than the level of animals, and may even be grouped among the legions of the devil.

The steps of struggle against the self

- Step 1: *Reflection*: One must devote some time every day to contemplate about his duties towards God, Who brought him into this world, bestowed him with a sound body and brain, and equipped him with intellect and capabilities, all of which are sources of pleasure and joy in his life. God also sent prophets and His Holy Book as a means of guidance and salvation. The aim of this life and purpose of all these blessings is more noble than to follow mundane desires and evil tendencies that are short lived and temporary. Death may come knocking at any time. This world is a place of doing good actions that result in permanent joy and take one into a higher sphere of existence. A person should therefore reflect on his destiny and his helplessness at the hands of time and age that are passing. He should feel regret before God for the loss of precious years of life and for past deeds that will bring him shame on the day of judgement. He should then begin his struggle to rise above this state of wretchedness and ask God for help to bless him with hope, sincerity, and strength to fight against satanic tendencies and evil traits of character, and to rise beyond material pleasures and worldly gains.
- Step 2: *Will and resolve*: Firm resolve is the essence of humanity and basic requirement to attain freedom from the domination of evil desires. The will that is required at this stage is synonymous with laying the foundation of a good life. The warrior in this battle of the self should purge himself from sins, perform all obligatory (*wajib*) acts, make an intention to compensate for the days lost (in sinfulness), and finally, resolve to behave as a rational religious person and a real human being. His manners should be an imitation of the Prophet's life, and he should follow the Prophet (s) in all his abstinences and choices. All this cannot be achieved unless he learns the laws of *Shari`ah* and follows them faithfully.
- Step 3: *Self-examination, evaluation and criticism*: After making a vow to be a person of strong will-power and resolution, he must understand that the hereafter is the place where his secrets will be exposed. Thus he should evaluate himself on a daily basis to get rid of evil habits and desires, to acquire more noble human character, and to perform better actions than before. He must realize that committing sin takes away from him noble essence of humanity and he must pray to God for His assistance and for the intercession of the Prophet (s) and the members of his Household (a).
- Step 4: *Self-conditioning*: The resolve and self-evaluation from the previous steps should form themselves into specific commitments to self-conditioning. For example, one who has an evil habit of lustful eyes, backbiting tongue, or inflated ego should say to himself, "I will not violate the Law of God today" and consciously avoid such habits for one day. By performing such an experiment with sincerity and resolve, he will realize how easy this task is. He should ignore Satan and the evil ideas that will magnify this small task as being difficult or even impossible. Thus, gradually, he can extend this period by experiment and see how easy it is to get rid of an evil habit or to acquire a positive merit.
- Step 5: *Guarding against evil*: A person struggling against his own self should constantly concentrate upon his intentions. If any time the idea of violating divine commands occurs to him, he should know that this idea has been instilled into his mind by Satan and his allies, who want to deter him from his good resolution. He ought to curse them, seek God's compassionate protection, and banish those evil ideas from the realm of his heart. He should reply to Satan that this day also he has to abide by the condition imposed upon his own self that he will not go against God's commands. Thus with the help of God, Satan will be driven away. One must remain in this same state of mind until night - the time for self-examination and evaluation of his deeds of the whole day. This is the time to see whether he has been honest to his Creator. If he has been faithful to God, he should be thankful to Him. Such a person has gone a step forward in His direction and became an object of His attention. God will thus continue to help him in performing all worldly and religious duties, and will diminish his pains of struggle in the next day. And if he repeats this exercise many times, he will be accustomed to acts of piety and the eradication of evil traits. He will observe that it does not require overly cumbersome efforts and obedience to God will give him abundant spiritual pleasure. God forbid, if there are any lapses on his part, he must ask God's forgiveness, and sincerely implore Him that he will be more careful in future. The Merciful God will throw open the doors of grace and compassion to him, and will guide him to the straight path.
- Step 6: *Remembrance*: During the whole journey of struggle against self, one should constantly remember God and the graces bestowed by Him. He must at each step, thank Him constantly for His help, mercy, and guidance in fulfilling his intentions. The degree of gratitude to God should increase as he attains a higher stage in his struggle against self. He must realize that it was because of God's help and response to sincere prayers that he was able to get rid of Satan and his allies from the domain of his heart and attain sublime human attributes loved by God. [adapted from Al-Khumayni, *Forty Hadith*, ch. 1, '*Jihad al- Nafs'*]